

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 14TH NOVEMBER, 2023** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Kemi Atolagbe (Chair), Sagal Abdi-Wali, Richard Cotton, Nasrine Djemai, Tommy Gale, Eddie Hanson, Nancy Jirira, and Bev Chambers and Victor Seedman (Co-opted Members)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillor Samata Khatoon and Ifrac Mahamoud (Co-opted Member)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member Better Homes

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Samata Khatoon and Ifrac Mahamoud (Co-opted Member).

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Broadcast of the meeting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for twelve months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available upon request.

Those who had asked to address the meeting were deemed to be consenting to having their contributions recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There were none.

5. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

There were none.

7. APPOINTMENT OF A CO-OPTED MEMBER

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

The Chair advised the meeting that sadly Andrea Radice had passed away and that Ifrac Mahamoud had stood down as a co-opted member, which meant that there were now two vacancies that needed to be filled. It was proposed and agreed that one of the positions be filled by Vic Seedman for the remainder of the municipal year, and the committee would give consideration to filling the other vacancy at the December meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT Vic Seedman be appointed as a co-opted member for the remained of the 2023/24 municipal year, and that consideration be given to filling the remaining vacancy at the December meeting.

8. HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 14th November, 2023

Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, and Rizwan Siddiqui, Policy and Performance Co-ordinator, and they along with Carol Carter, Chief Executive Origin, Sandra Fawcett, Director of Customer Operations, One Housing (Riverside Group), David Hunter, Housing Director (Clarion), and Gemma Harvey, Head of Housing Notting Hill Genesis (North region), gave the following key responses to questions;

- All housing associations and other providers were having to work within very challenging economic conditions these included increasing financial costs due to higher inflation and interest rates, cost of living crisis for tenants (which has led to further resources needing to be put in place to deal with the outcomes of this), along with the new building and fire safety regulations and further changes to the regulatory environment (especially around the coming consumer standards). This had meant that resources had to be reprioritised into these areas, and this had a knock-on effect in relation to resourcing service provision and housing development.
- All large housing associations had teams dealing with complaints, with councillor enquiries also going through these routes. New processes and practices were being put in place to improve the way that complaints were being handled to make it easier to report issues, along with ensuring the complaint was being properly handled, and when necessary learned from. The number of complaints should not be seen as an issue as it showed that tenants understood they could and had a right to raise issues of concern, rather the key issue was had that issue been properly responded to and the way the tenant had felt going through that journey. This had not always gone as well as it should and there was more work that needed to be done in this area.
- When necessary, tenant engagement arrangements within the associations would be used to seek the views of tenants regarding policy and operational changes to complaints handling and other such practice changes. Such changes would be made known to tenants through existing communication routes operated by the housing associations.
- The housing associations present had tenant representation on boards, and a tenants committee which were used to provide tenants views on policy and operational issues. These positions were filled through tenants applying for the role when a position was advertised. They then went through an appointment process, with an officer making the decision on the appointment. This process was used as tenants on such bodies had to meet the same due diligence process and standards as other board members. Recruitment to these positions was proving to be challenging.
- All housing associations work with and respond to the regulator and Housing Ombudsman guidance and directions for service improvements.
- The regulator was currently investigating matters which may impact on Origin Housing Limited's compliance with the Governance and Financial Viability Standard the outcome of which was expected over the next few weeks. Origin were also considering merging with Places for People (who were a national housing association), as the current board felt that this would enable them to

better meet the needs of its current and future tenants. The final decision on this would be made on this early next year. The merger, should it happen, would not lead to any initial changes to service provision but over time services would become integrated and consolidated under Places for People.

- One Housing joined the Riverside Group in December 2021 as a subsidiary, but they continue to operate as One Housing at this point and they were based in Camden and committed to local services. They had recently published their self-assessment on the complaint handling code, confirming that they were compliant. They would be looking to do some amendments to that code from April 2024, and they would be asking for responses from landlords, tenants, on this by the end of November.
- Notting Hill Genesis, as of earlier this year, were undergoing an operations transformation, which was as a result of the recognition that it needed to change the way that its services were delivered at the very front level, as its customer satisfaction has been depleting for some time, and the current model had been in existence since 2010 so they felt it was time that this should be reviewed. They were merging services to ensure that they were more effective in delivering good customer services. Following the input of the Regulator, the organisation had brought in a new team and a new approach to complaints handling. Also a number of tenant engagement sessions had been held which had sought to improve the communication flow between the service and tenants.
- The housing associations present had in place processes and procedures to deal with issues like flooding through either planned maintenance of the estate, or through an emergency response process that would seek to bring together appropriate teams (e.g. repairs, decants and tenancy services) that would seek to tackle the incident and its impact on the tenant and their home. Following an emergency situation a tenant may need to be decanted usually in the form of a hotel in the first instance (which may be out of borough), so that they were placed somewhere safe whilst an assessment of the level of repairs that were needed in the property was carried out. This would involve a surveyor going out to do an inspection of the property who would then let the service know what was needed to be done before the tenant could return. Also following an emergency incident, a lessons learned process would be undertaken, that would also provide the tenant with advice surrounding preventative actions they could undertake.
- Some tenants did not have the contents insurance which had caused them issues in the past when a flood or incident had happened, which had caused associations challenges on how to deal with them. The associations did advise tenants that they should obtain this type of cover but some tenants for financial reasons did not have the money to pay for insurance.
- The housing associations had in place mutual exchange arrangements that were open to its tenants (which for some could include the opportunity to move out of London if they wished), and they were advised of this arrangement through newsletters and the association's website. Under occupancy was also an issue and if more such homes could be freed up then that would go some way to helping those people having to live in over

occupied homes. The operation of these arrangements were challenging due to the lack of properties available especially in the area where a person currently lived. When appropriate resident days had been held that provided information regarding these arrangements, where officers were available to provide details on the offers and support available to a tenant if they were interested in taking up one of these schemes.

- The housing associations had policies that outlined repair responsibilities for the association (these were the bulk of repairs that were undertaken), and the tenant and these were available to view on their websites.
- Clarion Housing Association had suffered a cyber-attack last year that impacted on its data collection processes which was why some of its performance data was either unavailable, out of sync with other housing associations or did not reflect actual performance.
- Investment in housing stock could go up and down each year, so spend figures on stock investment could look different at different times. There was though a commitment to continue investing in home improvements along with building new homes, but this would always be restricted due to the level of resources that were available.
- Clarion Housing Association would reassess the information provided in relation to number of reported anti-social behaviour cases reported in Camden, and provide an update to members on the outcomes.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

- Most tenancies were allocated through the nomination process from local authorities, with just a number of homes being retained for existing tenants to be able to access through internal transfer. Further information regarding how this was advertised within Camden, along with information on the resources allocated to improvements to existing stock would be made available in next year's annual report.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

- The new tenancy satisfaction measure outcomes that would be available next year would allow a proper assessment of an association's performance, this would enable the local authority and tenants to compare this with other social housing provider's performance. This would then provide baseline data that could be properly tracked going forward.
- The types of internal finishing used for private tenant, market rent or intermediate rent homes maybe different from social housing homes but those social housing homes were still completed to a high standard with usually the housing associations specifications (which were given to the developer) being applied. This meant that the properties looked very similar, and when schemes had been developed where there are facilities like gyms there would be provision for the social housing tenants to access the facilities at a discounted rate. Where there may be a difference was the provision of a

concierge service which normally, due to the cost, would not be offered to social housing tenants.

- Housing Associations agreed to invite Councillors to attend viewings of new build provision within the borough, as several schemes were coming up in the next few months.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

The Chair thanked the housing association representatives for attending and answering the scrutiny committee's questions.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

9. HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing.

Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing and Ododo Dafe, Head of Innovation and Improvement, took the meeting through the report and they gave the following key responses to questions;

- Rent arrears remained a key challenge for the Council, with tenants struggling with additional financial pressures from rising heating charges, rent charges and the general cost of living. Though the arrears had increased recent data showed a slow-down in the rate of growth. Officers had been able to recoup £200,000 this month through the interventions and support they had been given tenants to pay them pay off their rent arrears. Also in relation to arrears for some tenants who were receiving housing benefits, it should be noted that service charges were not included and tenants had to pay for these services themselves, the delay in receiving benefits due to the time taken for their benefit to be assessed, and not being in receipt of full benefit all had an impact on the figures. Tenants in rent arrears were being supported by officers through the difficult times they were facing, and processes had been put in place to ensure that officers went through appropriate stages before seeking rental contributions.
- Officers were also enabling tenants to make contributions to their rent arrears easier. One of the ways they were doing this was enabling the tenant to now pay their rent contributions over the phone to the officer supporting them, rather than the tenant having to go through to another officer. The Council would though consider write-offs of the rent arrears if it was proving uneconomical to pursue the arrears, though it was not something it would do lightly.
- The Council was working to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and had been working with a full DAHA co-ordinator since March 2023. The Council was really just at the start of its journey in

relation to seeking this recognition, and it would take the necessary time to get its processes and procedures right so at the end it was successful in its application.

- The Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) Panel was being trialled for 3 months to assess and review applications made under this category. Following the three months trial then an assessment would be undertaken to see if the processes were working and see if it was making a difference, along with whether more time was needed to get a fuller picture. One of the things officers were considering was whether or not they could actually take out domestic violence from the harassment process and have it as standalone category, along with looking at different ways of attaching points to such a category as part of the Council's allocation scheme.
- Officers would provide members of the scrutiny committee with a copy of the presentation slides in relation to the process for seeking DAHA accreditation.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (OD)

- The Housing Transformation programme was seeking to look at all aspects of housing management services with a view to making improvements to service provision. A Housing Programme Co-ordinator had been charged with seeking to make improvements to the way the council responded to housing complaints and members enquiries.
- The Council had a capital programme that sought to fund planned maintenance work to its social housing stock. The programme was led by the stock conditions survey that sought to identify issues that needed work, this included any works to improve the operation of the lifts it managed.
- The initial findings arising from the intensive tenant participation program was identifying the key issue for tenants was anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour issues were complex, resource intensive, required a multidisciplinary response and took a long time to resolve. So the Council was putting in place a team to look at the more complex cases to seek deal with them, rather than using the existing process.
- A repairs improvement plan had been developed, and one of its work streams was looking at voids performance with a view to improving the turnaround time. Part of this work would look at the work flow from when a property became empty to when it was let to see what actions happened, and what could now be improved upon to enable a quicker turn-a-round. This could involve an anticipation date being identified for the tenant when appropriate safety checks and subsequent repairs were to be completed. This would enable the property to be advertised earlier, allow for a viewing, along with the tenant getting themselves ready in terms of any benefits they needed to claim or any actions they needed to undertake before they moved in, rather than this process only happening when the works had been completed.
- Some of the hard to let voids were now being put back into the system which had impacted on the void average re-let figures, as the Council was now seeking to get some of these properties back into use. These new

approaches had been well received by tenants and residents after officers had shared with them at a recent DMC workshop that they had attended.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, and Scot Reid, Head of Property Customer Services and Engagement, took the meeting through the report and they then gave the following key responses to questions;

- The Council currently did not have a fund available to pay for the redecoration of a tenants home after a mould wash had been undertaken, but officers would look at what other options could be considered to help tenants who needed this kind of support and this would be picked up in a future report to the committee.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

- The Repairs Service had set up a neighbourhood liaison team who were working with colleagues in neighbourhood services to seek to deal with tenants and resident's repairs based issues.
- Officers would liaise directly with Councillor Nancy Jirira in relation to the cases she raised.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (SR)

- The Council's Contact Centre ensured that tenants were able to raise issues 24 hours and day, 7 days a week. Along with this tenants and residents were able to report issues via the Council's Whats app, SMS and web chat messaging services, and these were now the most effective ways of raising a repair issue. The Contact Centre still provided a telephone reporting service that was available for people to use if they wished in the event of an emergency, they were a vulnerable tenant or did not have access to other means of communication.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

11. UPDATE FROM CABINET MEMBER FOR BETTER HOMES

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member Better Homes.

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member Better Homes, took the meeting through the report and gave the following key responses to questions;

- There were a large number of agencies that were seeking to act on behalf of tenants on a 'no win no fee' basis, that were making the Council's approach to tackling damp and mould more difficult due to the amount of officer time having to be spent dealing with the case. These agencies often had representatives out door knocking tenants seeking to take up work on their behalf, and the Council would look into what action it could do in relation to this.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (MJ)

- The Council only sought to use the eviction process as a last resort but it had to be part of the options available to the authority in seeking to deal with issues like rent arrears (especially where the tenant was unwilling to pay anything) or anti-social behaviour.
- There were examples of operatives undertaking good quality work in the community which was being recognised by tenants and residents.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

12. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

The meeting determined that in relation to the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel, the new Chair should be Councillor Kemi Atolagbe, and it should now be a 3 member panel.

The meeting was advised that the work programme should be revised to add for the December meeting the Cabinet report on the Camden Capital Works Framework Procurement, and for the January 2024 meeting a Local Ombudsman report.

The scrutiny committee Members agreed to contact the Cabinet Member for Better Homes directly regarding the issues (that were not already on the agenda), they wished him to address in his December report.

ACTION BY: Committee Members

Programme of meetings (new items in bold)

Meeting date: Monday 18th December

- Housing Services (Housing Needs) *Report to include: allocations, rough sleeping, sheltered housing.*
- Housing Supply: *Report to include CIP delivery including small sites (Cabinet report), Temporary Accommodation Purchasing Programme, private rented sector*
- **Camden Capital Works Framework Procurement (Cabinet Report)**
- Update on fire safety and regulatory standards
- HRA Budget Update
- Cabinet Member better Homes – Update
- Work programme

JANUARY 2024

- HRA rent setting (Cabinet report)
- Tenancy arrears and rent collection
- Cost of Living update
- Update on fire safety and regulatory standards
- **Local Ombudsman Report**
- Cabinet Member Better Homes – Update
- Work programme

FEBRUARY 2024

- CIP annual report
- Report of Cabinet Adviser: Leaseholder billing and service charges
- Homelessness Scrutiny Panel (provisional date)
- Update on fire safety and regulatory standards
- Cabinet Member Better Homes annual report
- Work programme

Yet to be programmed

- Tenants Satisfaction Regulatory Survey, when it was available.
- Update reports regarding the Cabinet Adviser reports on Supporting Rough Sleepers, Estates Mission and Tenants Participation.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report work programme and the changes to the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel be revised as outlined above.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END